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Closed Hearing on Judicial Nominee

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Washington — The Senate Judiciary Committee plans to hold a rare closed hearing later this month on whether CIA counsel Stanley Sporkin, a nominee for a federal judgeship, interfered with an FBI investigation of a leak at the CIA, according to Senate sources.

CIA Director William Casey has agreed to be a witness at the hearing if his testimony is necessary to get Sporkin confirmed, sources said. Sporkin, who made his reputation as a tough enforcement chief at the Securities and Exchange Commission, was tapped by Casey in 1981 to join the CIA.

Casey has been lobbying senators of both parties in recent weeks to break a 16-month hold on the nomination, which has been stalled mostly because of conservative Republican opposition led by Sen. Jeremiah Denton of Alabama. President Ronald Reagan nominated Sporkin in June, 1984, to be a U.S. District Court judge in the District of Columbia.

Two weeks ago, Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.), minority leader of the Senate Judiciary Committee, asked committee chairman Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.) to at least hold a hearing so Sporkin could respond to the objections against him.

"If someone has an allegation against me they should put up or shut up," Sporkin said in a telephone interview last night.

"People can try to destroy you by innuendo. I'm

Sources said the controversy involves Sporkin's role in alerting a former CIA official to an FBI investigation and advising him to get a lawyer. Sources said the official had been fired by Casey in June, 1984, for giving highly classified information to persons with "Middle East interests." The sources said the allegations also concern whether Sporkin was involved in the actual leak and used the official as a shield.

Mark Goodin, a spokesman for Thurmond, said the decision to hold the closed meeting was "to protect classified information and allow the witnesses to be candid." The session is scheduled for Oct. 21.

Goodin, acknowledging that closed hearings on judicial candidates were rare, said the incident that "sparked the controversy had nothing to do with his qualifications. It regards his role at the CIA and it can't be disclosed."

The committee has also asked the Justice Department for classified documents of its investigation of the leak, according to a department source.

CIA spokeswoman Kathy Pherson said Casey declined to comment. "The judgeship is a private thing; we are not involved," she said.

From 1971 to 1973, Sporkin worked for Casey, who was then head of the SEC. Sporkin, 53, is generally credited with saving Casey from the Watergate scandals by advising him to ignore the White House's request to end the SEC investigation of financier Robert Vesco, who had made contributions to Richard Nixon's re-election fund.

Sporkin's nomination initially attracted opposition from business groups because of his fervor at the SEC in ferreting out illegal corporate payments and overseas bribes.

Sporkin's supporters contend the leak controversy is being used to block his nomination out of fear that he will be too liberal a judge and out of dislike of Casey.



Nominee Sporkin



CIA Director Casey

sick of it," Sporkin said. "I just want the hearing I am entitled to. My nomination has been held up for 16 months." He declined to discuss the specific charges against him. "I still have to learn what they are," he said. "It changes all the time."

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